

Islam and Society



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Islam and Society

Welcoming the newborn

A Muslim's every act is a servitude to Allah. What else could be more rewarding than helping create and welcoming a new servant of Allah on earth? Nine months may not be that much, but for a baby in the womb it brings the end of an extraordinary stage of his journey. It is a journey through which the spurting fluid: *"He was created from a fluid, ejected"* (Qur'an 86:6) is fashioned in the safe lodging of mother's womb and grows bigger and bigger to become a human being. *"And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging [i.e., in the womb]. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump [of flesh], and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators."* (Qur'an 23:12-14) As the human being is not meant to be confined in a tiny space, he needs a wider physical world in order to go through the process of 'test and tribulation' for which he is destined. The birth of a baby is a mixture of anxiety, excitement and expectation. For mothers it is a fulfilling experience. Allah has given in them unusual resilient strength and courage to bear the burden and discomfort. A new life in their lap is a dream coming true for both the parents. It is the ultimate experience for a couple of 'togetherness', both working in unison to bring a new creature into the world.

Although parenthood is a matter of preparedness from the time one plans to marry, birth initiates the 'real world' experience of parenting. Labor is a traumatic and painful physical, as well as psychological, experience for a woman. For many husbands it may be hard to watch their beloved one in pain, but their presence has soothing effect on their partners. It reduces anxiety and provides a feeling of security to wives when most needed. The shared experience creates deeper bond between the couple in their common goal to serve Allah.

The comfort and safety of the baby suddenly shatters in the new unknown world. The tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches that when a baby is born he needs to be cleansed and dressed. Father or some one close in the family should recite ritual call for collective prayer in the right ear and ritual announcement for starting the prayer in the left ear. In the world of spirit man declared his instinctive readiness to accept Allah as his Lord: *"And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, saying to them, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we have testified.'" This - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, 'Indeed, we were of this unaware.'* (Qur'an 7:172). The first sound to reach a baby's ear should thus be the declaration of Allah's Greatness, so that the sound always reverberates in his memory and settled in his

soul. It is mentioned in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that devil runs away by the sound of the call for collective prayer.

The mother of the faithful Ayesha said: "I saw Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) giving the call for collective prayer in the ear of al-Hussein the son of 'Ali when his mother, Fatima, gave birth to him". When a child was born in a family, Ayesha would not ask whether it was a boy or girl, rather she would ask "is it complete and sound?" so, if she was told that it was, she would say, "all praise and thanks for Allah, Lord of all creation". It is an excellent practice to give a bit of small chewed date to the baby, so that he starts his life with sweetness. Ayesha said: "New born children used to be brought to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and he would supplicate for blessing for them and rub a chewed date upon his/her palate".

Muslim parents have instinctive supplication for their new-born. The supplication by Mary's mother in this regard is unique "But when she delivered her, she said, *"My Lord, I have delivered a female."* And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, and the male is not like the female. *"And I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You and for her descendants from Satan, the expelled from the mercy of Allah"* (Qur'an 3:36). Arrival of a child in a family is a glad tidings that needs to be conveyed and shared (Qur'an 3:39, 37:101).

Islamic Customs in the first Week of a Child

Every child is held in pledge for the sacrifice to be made for him on his seventh day and he is named on it and his head is shaved. Names should be linked with his father (Qur'an 33:5). Names have to be meaningful. Praiseworthy names are those which mean slaves of Allah or His attributes, the Prophets and the pious people. "The most beloved of your names in the eye of Allah, the Mighty and Magnificent, are Abdullah and Abdur-Rahman". Names should not be such which are disapproved or forbidden by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Sons and Daughters to be Treated Equally

The gender of a child should not bother parents. After all, it is divine will. Sons and daughters must be treated equally. In pre-Islamic period and some other societies, daughters were the symbol of embarrassment and were treated in shameful manner to the extent that some fathers buried them alive. It is an irony that many societies even today do not welcome the birth of daughters in the same way they do with sons. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever takes care of two girls until they reach adulthood, he and I will stay on the Day of Resurrection - and he interlaced his fingers. Prophet Muhammad's behavior with his daughter Fatima was exemplary.

The Demand from the Newborn Babies

The demand from the newborn babies is continuous and tremendous. Mothers should be in the forefront in making sure that the baby is clean, well-fed, loved and protected. Breast-milk is the perfect food for human babies. The physical touch of the baby with the mother during breastfeeding creates exhilarated relationship between the two. This is the root of life-long love between a mother and a child. Newborn babies are fully dependent on adults. The only way they can communicate is crying when they are hungry or uncomfortable and smiling when they are happy. Their hands and feet participate in their action. Babies like to be rocked and talked to. The excellent practice for parents is to recite the Qur'an for them. Holding a baby in the arms is one of the most emotionally fulfilling experiences in life. Watching a baby grow and thrive is most rewarding. Getting to know a new born baby in the first few days and weeks is also a thrilling experience which reaches far beyond just caring for his daily needs. The baby

learns about his parents, the family and the surroundings. It is an unforgettable time for the whole family watching a tiny person making sense of the world around him. In this process parents also get more matured and responsible in life. It is an interactive dynamic process. Children are the source of vigor to the heart, joy to the souls and pleasure to the eyes. Wealth and children are adornments to human beings (Qur'an 18:47) which allure them toward worldly life. Many forget the role of proper upbringing their children because of the intense love for them. Parents are for the protection and physical care of their children. Time is the invaluable gift parents can give to their children. On top of everything, Muslim parents are in obligation to pass on the trust of faith to their children from the very young and tender age, so that they can grow with balanced Muslim personality. Only then they can bear witness to the Truth before mankind in the future.

Islamic Perspective on Parenting

Islam wants all human beings to grow up as emissaries of Allah on earth. In that respect, parenting in Islam is a divine responsibility. Parental duty is at the heart of Muslim life. For a sound and healthy continuity of Islamic civilized legacy, every parent has to transfer the spirit and message of Islam to his offspring. If an individual parent cannot cope with this great and demanding task for some reason, the community has to create such network that nobody in the Muslim Nation falls through the net and joins the hapless mob of disconcerted and lapsed 'Muslims'. It also tells of the immense obligation of the guardians of a household. In fact, every one in a Muslim family is jointly responsible according to his role in the house.

Islam teaches Muslims to live unselfishly, even if it means to give up one's own life for others. Here lies the root historic reason of Islam's lightning success of winning people's heart in its hey days. Self-centered nature and the concept of 'individualism' has very little to do in a caring and compassionate society. These are departures from basic human qualities and make a society avaricious and dangerously competitive. They are the features of materialistic societies where human beings vie with each other to endure and triumph. (Qur'an 3:14). This gives rise to the rule of the 'survival of the fittest' which makes some super rich and powerful at the cost of the majority. In contrast, Islam advocates for social responsibility, without of course endangering personal creativity and innovation.

It is a balancing act, like walking in the tight rope. Losing balance due to callousness and indifference brings him down to bottomless pit. Only a full consciousness of what Allah has demanded from man can save him from that fate, i.e., a hellish life in this world and eternal hell in the hereafter. All these are great tests of real life. Excessive love for children should not fool the parents in their divinely ordained responsibilities. Disproportionate love for or apathy to the children is the recipe for misfortune. Those who are blessed with children should always weigh out whether their children would emancipate them from or throw them into hell fire. (Qur'an 66:6)

There is no room for complacency in parental responsibility. There is also no room for compromise with the basic principles of Islam. Of course, most parents do make little compromises in a real life of living in ignorance. But they must be forthcoming and honest with their children. If parents fail in sticking to ideal Islamic solutions for some reasons, they must openly admit them and clarify to the children so that they understand the context. However, they must keep on trying to improve their lot.

Muslim Personality

A Muslim has a distinct attitude toward life. This dictates his moral character and external manners. His personality shines through his look and behavior. In fact, they become imbedded in his nature. Everything he does has characteristic features of an emissary of Allah on earth. As he is conscious of his assignment in the world he illuminates himself with the light of virtue and good manners. Prophet Muhammad's emphatic call upon Muslims to attain and exercise good manners is a weighty one. Here are some of the examples of what he said on this;

One companion narrated: We were sitting in the presence of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so quietly as if birds were perched on our heads. Nobody had the courage to open his mouth. In the meanwhile a person came and asked the prophet, "among Allah's slaves who is the dearest to Him?" The prophet replied; "One who has the best moral character". He was also asked, "Which Muslim has the perfect faith"? He answered, "he who has the best moral character". One of the companions narrated: I have heard Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) saying, "should I not tell you who among you is the most likeable person to me and who will be the nearest to me on the Day of the Judgment? He repeated this question two or three times. The people requested him to tell them about that person. He said: "he who among you has the best moral character". He also said: "I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting good morals". It is also narrated from him his saying: "my Lord has taught me good manners and He has mannered me well".

Best training with best trainer building a Muslim personality needs constant and conscious training and practice. It is not merely a collection of do's and don'ts. Effective training requires competent trainers with excellent qualities on whom people can put their trust and confidence in. A trainer possessing exemplary character can infuse emotional attachment to the learning process. Who else other than the Prophet himself possesses this perfect character? Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the perfect example, the role model, of the good moral character to be emulated till the end of the Day. Allah, the Merciful Himself, has testified his perfect character in the Qur'an. (Qur'an 33:21, 9:129) Abdullah the son of 'Amr said: ' Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was neither ill-mannered nor rude. He used to say that the best among you are those who are best in their moral character.

Rights of Allah and Creation

Religion is a contract between a servant and his Creator. In Islam this contract entails two types of relationship - one between man and Allah, and the other, between man and the creation. This relationship has the essential rights and responsibilities. A Muslim life is essentially a life of continuous effort, struggle, to implement Allah's divine will on earth. A servant's success or failure depends on effective dissemination of that will. He only makes effort to the best he can. Whether he succeeds or fails in the world is immaterial to him. His ultimate gain lies in the Hereafter. That does not mean that he carries his job with lethargy and inefficiency.

Features of a Muslim

What are then the features of a Muslim? Among the endless but coherent list, mentioned in the Qur'an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), there are some the Muslim parents can easily remember and instill in their children. A simple acronym, FEATURES, may prove a useful checklist.

F= Friendliness
E = Efficiency
A = Adaptability
T = Trustworthiness
U = Uncompromising (in principles of Islam)
R = Reliability
E = Expertise
S = Sociability

Ingredients of a Blessed Family

Family, the bedrock of human civilization, is a sacred institution and as such it needs to be universally preserved. It should not only be defended robustly, but promoted with passion and conviction.

1. Love

Love is at the core of family life. It is the gel that produces a rock-solid relationship among the members. Love emanates from heart. Hearts join and create the fountain of love between people. Love is imbedded in human nature and a gift from Allah. Human history has exceptional stories on love affairs. Love for one's own children is obvious. But love between husband and wife, the two grown up people, needs nurturing. Pure physical attraction can not create love or maintain it for long. Attraction before marriage that gives rise to the romance of 'boy-friend, girl-friend' relationship most often fails in the test and ends up in changed relationship. People looking for a 'family life' can contribute to permanent love. They have the best chance to succeed in their relationship. An Islamic vision of life in the family makes love exceptionally rewarding. This needs Allah's special blessing without which men and women could be in the pit of fire (Qur'an 8:63). Love should not be blind, except for Islam. Islam demands unconditional love for Allah and His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), above anything else, including one's life. (Qur'an 9:24). Love between parents transmits to children. Children growing up in a family where parents lack minimum level of love may grow up with emptiness. Love has external manifestation and that is natural. This should not be so ostentatious that it creates public indecency. Ostentatious love in public is not consistent with Islamic and human decency and as such deplorable.

2. Kindness, Care and Compassion

These tender feelings are at the heart of family and social life. Allah, "Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (Qur'an 1:2), has created man out of His love and mercy and demands from us the same. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Have mercy on those in the land, so that the One in Heaven will have mercy on you." "Allah is kind and He loves kindness in all affairs." "He who is deprived of leniency is deprived of goodness." "When Allah, the Exalted, wills some good towards the people of a household, He introduces kindness among them." "Allah loves kindness and rewards it in such away that He does not reward for harshness or anything else." Children deprived of kindness and compassion in their childhood are punished for no fault of their own. Parental indifferences and ill temper kill their childhood and may rob them of their future happiness.

3. Respect

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "One who does not respect the elders and show kindness to the young ones is not among us." Human beings are the manifestation of divine will, with Allah's 'spirit in each of them, and as such deserve due respect. Every human being grows up with certain traits of personality. Even the twin brothers or sisters have unique characteristics. Respect for an individual is a natural demand that brings reciprocity. We all learn from each other, even from a tiny baby. Every one has opinion on different aspects of life. Respect for opinion and the freedom of expression give rise to motivation and creativity. Of course, the formulation and expression of opinions depend on family and social environment. Positive encouragement is essential to achieve these. Even though family members live under the same roof, every one has a world of his own that needs to be respected. As children grow older, they need to learn the etiquette of a Muslim house. Islam teaches decency, and family is the first institution where they should learn them. Islam requires members of the household to seek permission when entering into another person's room. Parents, of course, need to know what is happening in their children's world, but they should do this with full honesty and without being intrusive and insensitive.

4. Consultation

Allah has commanded believers to conduct their affairs and settle their differences in consultation (Qur'an 3:159, 42:38). It is illuminating that Allah discussed with His angels about His plan to create man on earth. This is mentioned in the Qur'an. Consultation is the prophetic way of life, which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) practiced in his domestic and public life. Consultation produces confidence, trust, interest, mutual respect and team spirit in the family. It enhances creativity and responsible outlook among members of the family. It gives a sense of ownership in everybody's mind, which is essential for any venture to succeed. It helps cure the disease of arrogance and egotism. It is the pillar of successful Islamic social life. Consultation in a family creates lively and dynamic environment. However, consultation needs diligence and relevance. Loyalty has relational aspect and a wider meaning. The minimum requirement in a family is that husband and wife must be loyal to each other in their marital relationship. Infidelity is a grave sin, punishable in harshest manner. While fidelity is rewarding in both the worlds, infidelity brings suspicion, mental torture, frustration and a 'hellish' atmosphere in this world and a real Hell in the Hereafter. In the wider sense, a family blends together through loyalty and trust among its members. In the history of mankind, family loyalty extended to tribal loyalty and created kingdoms and civilizations. Tribal loyalty was at the heart of pre-Islamic period features. Islam refined its dynamic and powerful features with a view to creating a 'global Muslim Nation'. Its potent force held sway and created an unparalleled civilization. Compromise and Sacrifice Family is about generations of close knit people living together, with shared space and other material resources. Sharing itself needs compromise and sacrifice. Sacrifice has many dimensions. Proper spending of time and wealth for the family is also sacrifice and in Islam this is treated as worship. Sacrificing one's opinion for wider benefit is also difficult for many. Sacrifice starts from the conscious understanding of what it means. It is an inescapable phenomenon in the world of creating human destiny, in Islamic work. Sacrifice is linked to self-surrender to Allah and the fullest conviction for Islam. It is an essential Islamic training that builds an individual's character and personality in order that he plays a meaningful role on earth. The history of mankind teaches one single message, e.g., sacrifice is at the core of victory.

5. Justice

Justice is at the heart of Allah's creative design. The creation of Heaven and Hell is because of this unfulfilled justice on earth. Justice is inter-twined with Truth. Maintaining proper balance between rights and responsibilities is also justice. Justice in the family does not necessarily mean equal share in everything for every one. In real world, Justice means equitable and balanced dealings. Most importantly, dealings in the family should not be seen as unjust, especially by the children. We may not be fully aware, children are keen observers of what happens around them and what their parents say or do. It becomes all the more important that parents become extra cautious in their behavior and dealings. Family is a mini-state and justice established there has impact on the society. Openness and Transparency When parents are open and transparent in their affairs; they have tremendous positive effect on the children. This may sometimes put parents on the spot, but this is what it should be. Prophet Muhammad's personal and family life was in the full glare of history. If parents attempt to hide some of their bad habits from their children, they have serious negative consequences on the children's personality.

6. Islamic Ethos

Establishment of an Islamic ethos in the house is the parental responsibility. Children do contribute to that, according to their age and maturity. When rituals and spirit of Islam are consciously cultivated and practiced in a family, they create a dynamic and happy environment where each member guards the other from evil. This gives rise to a positive learning atmosphere in the society.

7. Supplication

Supplication for children by the parents is rewarding. Allah likes this. This is a prophetic practice. It creates love and respect for each other. The Qur'an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) contain many supplications of this nature.

The Social Features

One of the advantages of the Islamic family is the fact that it is made out of cement which is social and therefore begins long before the marriage, but the special relationship that we refer to as the love relationship is supposed to begin and to grow only after marriage and not before. Before marriage, there is social affinity between the two families of the couple. After marriage, one enters upon this relationship with a determination to make it grow and, therefore the chances of a love relationship between husband and wife growing and becoming more secure and stronger are better under the Islamic system. Marriage is regarded as the beginning not the consummation; it is not something that is practically finished on the wedding day. It is something that begins on the wedding day, and has all the future in which to flower and become greater. The determination with which this is entered into by the Muslim spouses allows ample room for adjustment because the commitment has already been made and therefore a Muslim who enters into marriage is determined to make that marriage work, determined to make the love relationship between the two spouses grow, and is therefore more ready for the adjustment that family life demands. If this relationship has grown to its apex before marriage and marriage is looked upon as a consummation of that movement, then the consequence is that the desire to adjust, the preparation to make the necessary sacrifices and adjustments, would be all the more because the interest in it would be on the wane rather than on the increase.

FAMILY LIFE

Family life is one of the most important and an emphasized area in the Islamic system of life, and it is an aspect, which remains very clear and strong among the vast majority of Muslims today. We will now have a look at the kinds of inter-relationships Islam establishes between husband and wife, parents and children, and among other members of the family group.

Marriage and the Roles of Husband and Wife

Among Muslims the selection of a marriage partner is very unique. In Islam marriage is not a sacrament but rather a legal, binding contract between a man and a woman which establishes the licitness, permanence and responsibility of their relationship, an acceptance of one another as spouses with a mutual commitment to live together according to the teachings of Islam. Both are to be mindful of their duty to God and their responsibilities to one another in all aspects of their interaction. "O mankind, be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty to God in Whom you claim your rights of one another, and toward the wombs. Verily, God is Watcher over you." (Qur'an, 4:1)

In Islam a woman, married or single, is seen as a person in her own right, not merely as an adjunct to her husband. Thus, for example, she has the full right of ownership and disposal of her own property and earnings even after marriage, and when she marries she retains her own family name instead of taking that of her husband. The stereotype of the Muslim woman as a mere household drudge, preoccupied from morning to night with cooking, cleaning and looking after the children, with no spirituality, interests, personality or life of her own, who is debarred from contributing in a constructive manner to society, has no basis in the Islamic teachings. For Islam regards men and women as completely equal in terms of accountability to God and in possessing unique personalities of their own. It prescribes for both the same religious obligations, apart from the concessions made for women's reproductive cycle, and makes conscious commitment to Islam, the doing of good, striving with all one's efforts in God's path, the development of spirituality and seeking knowledge equally the duty of both men and women, as the following Qur'anic verses indicate: "And their Lord answered them: 'Verily, I will not allow the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. You proceed from one another.'" (Qur'an, 3:195) "And whoever does good, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a Believer, these will enter Paradise and they will not be wronged by so much as the groove of a date-stone." (Qur'an, 4:124) "And the Believers, men and women, are protecting friends to one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, they observe regular prayer and pay obligatory charity and they obey God and His Messenger. As for these, God will have mercy on them. Verily, God is Mighty, Wise. God promises the Believers, men and women, Gardens underneath which rivers flow, to abide therein- blessed dwellings in Gardens of Eden. And greater than that, God's good pleasure: that is the supreme success." (Qur'an, 9:71-72)

At the same time, Islam recognizes that women have a more delicate, sensitive and emotional nature than men and men are asked to treat them in accordance with this nature. There are many beautiful traditions of the Prophet (peace be on him) which enjoin kindness and consideration for women and advise Muslims to treat their wives with respect, honor and that quality of tenderness which suits the delicacy of their feminine nature; the best men, he said, are those who are best to their wives. Because the natures of the male and the female are not the same, each has been entrusted with a particular role and function in society; these roles are complementary and each is equally basic and essential to the functioning of the society. Within

this framework there is freedom for both men and women to pursue what is important to them and to contribute to society in keeping with their own individual skills and interests, provided their responsibilities for the home are not neglected and their work does not in any way jeopardize their dignity and modesty. Women must fill many essential positions in society which they can handle better or instead of men, for example, some branches of medicine, nursing, education, social work and other areas. In Prophet Muhammad's time we find women enduring persecution, exile and even martyrdom for the sake of their faith at the hands of the pagans together with men, and during battle carrying water to the wounded, tending the injured and on occasion participating in the fighting as well. We find them discussing and even disputing various matters with Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself. Concerning the marriage relationship God says: "And among His signs is that He created mates from among yourselves that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. (Qur'an, 30:21) "It is He Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate that he might take rest in her... (Qur'an, 7:189)

The tone of marriage in Islam is thus one of mutual respect, kindness, love, companionship and harmonious interaction. In her husband, the wife has a friend and partner to share her life and concerns, to cherish and protect her, and to help her bear responsibilities which would be very difficult or impossible for her to handle alone, while a man has in his wife a companion and helper who can give him peace, comfort and repose in his struggle with the rough-and-tumble of the world's life. In the beautiful language of the Qur'an it is sated: "The wives are your garments and husbands are their garments. (Qur'an, 2:187), Serving for one another the same function as a cherished piece of clothing: to be a comfort, a protection, a security, that which serves and beautifies and warms and enfolds and covers and conceals what is private from the eyes of the world.

The marriage relationship also involves another fundamental responsibility: the responsibility of both husband and wife to meet one another's sexual needs and at the same time not to seek elsewhere for the satisfaction of these needs. While marriage in Islam legitimizes the fulfillment of an otherwise prohibited desire, it also requires that husband and wife reserve their sexuality exclusively for each other. There is to be no playing around in a Muslim marriage; adultery is, as we have seen, not only one of the most serious sins but also, in Islamic law, a heinous crime. Moreover, the protection of women from anything which dishonors, degrades or in any way exploits their sexuality is considered extremely essential. Islam, therefore, lays down certain limits for both men and women so that sexual attraction and expression will be confined solely to the private relationship of husband and wife, and hence will not become a source of harm or disruption in the society. Marriages among Muslims are, by and large, remarkably stable. This is due to a number of factors.

The first of these is that the basic ingredient of the Muslim marriage is a common set of values, principles and ways of living. Consequently a Muslim husband and wife, even if they come from different cultures and backgrounds, possess the same basic world view, frame of reference, and many similar attitudes and habits which serve to bind them together in a harmonious relationship.

Second, even with all the problems and pressures existing today in Muslim societies, marital and family stability is encouraged and reinforced by various societal institutions.

Third, Muslims are as a rule used to living with other people and are consequently skilled in adjusting themselves to various relationships; for this reason they tend in general to be somewhat tolerant and forbearing in their interaction with others, even when there are differences or frictions of one sort or another.

Another reason may be that Muslim men and women are generally quite accepting of their masculine and feminine roles.

Consequently, because the division of roles and responsibilities between husband and wife is as a rule clearly defined and acknowledged, many problems and frictions are avoided. Again, Muslims are generally surrounded by a network of many relationships with relatives and friends.

This gives each partner his or her own life apart from the spouse, with many other satisfying relationships, emotional outlets and sources of support. Hence neither husband nor wife is forced to depend on a single relationship for all their emotional satisfactions, thus putting an almost unsupportable burden on one's partner and untenable strains on the marriage, for the variety of rewarding interactions with others makes life tolerable even if there are frictions between the partners.

In summary, it's seen as a flesh-and-blood relationship between two very human individuals. In such a relationship strains and problems sometimes do arise. When they do, they are dealt with within the marriage relationship, assisted by the cushioning effect of the society, rather than by breaking up the marriage and the family unit, which is in the long run more difficult and damaging than accommodating and showing tolerance and patience, except in extreme cases, in which divorce is not only desirable but essential. Because of all these built-in safeguards, therefore, marriage among Muslims is basically a stable and viable institution.

Raising Responsible Children

When we teach Islam to our children, we raise them to be righteous and responsible Muslims who will subsequently treat us with kindness and respect. Islam is the religion that clearly raises the status of the parents to a high degree and honor. In fact, Allah in many verses of the Qur'an has commanded us to please our parents after pleasing Him. After our firm belief in Him, our Creator has enjoined us to treat our parents with kindness and respect: Allah says: "Worship none but Allah and be dutiful and treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and give charity" (Qur'an, 2:83) He also says: "Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are of kin, neighbors who are strangers, the companions by your side, the wayfarer you meet, and what your right hands possess: for Allah loves not the arrogant, vainglorious." (Qur'an, 4:36) Furthermore, He says: "Say: 'Come, I will rehearse what Allah has (really) prohibited you from: join not anything with Him; be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want, We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not nigh to indecent deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law. Thus does He command you, that you may learn wisdom.'" (Qur'an, 6:151) In line with the above Qur'anic injunctions is the commonly quoted Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which shows how the true Muslim must be more dutiful to his parents than any other person in the world: A man came to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and said, "O Allah's Messenger! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?" Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Your mother." The man said, "Who is next?" Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Your mother." The man asked (for the fourth time), "Who is next?" Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Your father." Allah the All Knowing and Most Merciful knows that parents especially mothers bear hardships in rearing their children. Thus, He commands children to show gratefulness to their parents. Every man, therefore, is expected to be good to his parents, especially when they attain their old age where they need most his care, service and respect:

And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is (your final) Goal." But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me. In the End the return of you all is to Me. And I will tell you all that you did. (Qur'an, 31:14-15)

Islam teaches us that it is for our success that we must obey Allah I by showing our utmost kindness and respect to our parents. We must also obey them for as long as they do not command us something that disobeys Allah I. We have to remember that if we please them, we please Allah I. This means, that through our parents we can attain Allah's rewards in the eternal world. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A parent is the best of the gates of Paradise; so if you wish, keep to the gate, or lose it."

We learn further that in Islam for every Muslim it is a blessing from Allah I if he has parents who are old as it gives him the opportunity to serve them and thus earns Allah's pleasure. He will receive success, especially the supreme success in Paradise if he follows Allah's commandment to be dutiful to his parents. This means that if we can raise our children, teach them knowledge of Islam or give them proper Islamic education by sending them to Islamic schools, we will be expecting them to take care of us especially during our old age the time when we will be in need of them. They will take care of us when we are weak and old as important members of their families and not to let us just stay in other's houses or at any home of the aged. Most of all, they will include us in their daily prayers, which is the best thing that they can give us. If we raise them to be righteous and they pray for our salvation then we attain ultimate success in the Life-Hereafter. "O my Lord (Allah)! Bestow on my parents Your Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood." (Qur'an, 17:24) "O my Lord (Allah)! Forgive me and my parents and anyone who enters my home as a believer." (Qur'an, 71:28)

Building the Children's Character

- Taking them to gatherings and letting them sit with grown-ups
- Talking to them about the heroic deeds of earlier and subsequent generations, Islamic battles and Muslim victories
- Teaching them good manners
- Giving them the praise and respect they deserve in front of others

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *I have been sent to perfect your conduct*" and he said: *"A fathers' teaching his child good manners is better than giving a bushel of grain (in charity)*

Role of parents in influencing the behavior of their children

Love

Growing children may not take an order, but will do things out of love and respect for their parents. So love and respect on a mutual basis is our best weapon against all the negative influences on them. Parental love should be unconditional and on biological grounds rather than on their achievements at school or in sports. Love should not be confused with unlimited permissiveness or with closed eyes towards a child's faults. Criticizing certain faults of the child should not diminish the love by the parents.

Information

Children are not born knowing everything right or wrong in social norms. They need clear guidelines about good and bad behavior, Islamic and un-Islamic way of life. The greatest effect is of the parent's attitude and example rather than the words in a book. If children see their parents not practicing what they themselves are told to practice they become rebellious and non-believers (in the value system). A typical example is of alcoholism in the American scene. Children are told it is bad for you until you are 18, while it is not bad for the parents. Therefore children seeing this as hypocrisy rebel and get alcohol, not from a liquor store, but from their own home or from a friend at parties. Therefore, parents should set the same standards for themselves as they set for their children, and share with them information of all kinds whether related to the outside world or inside the family. It is not the knowledge which hurts, but the lack of it or misuse of it which causes problems.

Decisions

Parents should help children make appropriate decisions and be responsible for their decisions. Younger children can only make decisions about the present (i.e. what clothes to wear that day), but grown-ups can make decisions that may affect their future, under parental guidance (i.e. selection of career, school and hobbies). Children left to grow on their own, will regret a lack of direction they had in their childhood. Children should be taught how to be responsible by being given the chance to share household work, keep their desk and room clean and how to handle their "own" money. Let them spend all their money and suffer from the lack of it. A sense of deprivation once in awhile is good for them as long as the reason for deprivation is explained well.

Bill of Rights for Muslim Children

- Muslim children have the right to learn and practice Islam even if one of their parents is a Non-Muslim, or non-practicing Muslim.
- They have a right to be treated as a person, in an environment that is conducive to their growth and maturity and to become useful citizens.
- They have a right to receive love, care, discipline, and protection from their parents.
- They have a right to receive education, and financial protection for the future.

Bill of Rights for Muslim Parents

- Parents have a right to receive love, respect and affection from their children as mentioned in the Quran.
- Parents have a right to educate and discipline their children as mentioned in the Quran and shown by the example of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
- Parents have a right to know more about their children, and monitor other influences affecting them.
- Parents have a right to say no to unusual financial and other demands of children.

Islam and Wealth

In Islam, all wealth is the possession of Allah with which humans are entrusted. It is a responsibility; it must be earned through permissible means and spent in permissible ways, such as spending on one's self and those for whom he is responsible for, without extravagance or waste. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A slave will not be able to take a step further on the Day of Requitil until he is taken to account for the following things: his time and

how he spent it, his knowledge and how he used it, his money and how he earned and spent it, and his youth and how he passed it."

Islam and Women

In Islam, men and women are different from each other and each has their respective roles. Honoring and respecting women in Islam is a sign of a good, wholesome character and an unadulterated nature. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The best of you are the best of you towards their wives." He also said: "Women are the twin halves of men." Women are equal to men in their humanity. They are not the source of sin nor are they the reason Adam was expelled from Heavens. Women are equal to men in their individuality. They neither lose their names nor the names of their family upon marriage. They do not fade away and blend into the identity of men. Women are equal to men in regards to reward and punishment in this life as well as the next. Women are equal to men in that Islam seeks to maintain and uphold their honor and chastity. Women are equal to men in that they have a right to inheritance, as do men. Women are equal to men in that they have full right to do as they please with their wealth as long as they do not do unlawful things. Women are equal to men in regards to the obligation of shouldering the responsibility of social reform. Women are equal to men in their right to receive an education and proper upbringing. Woman and man have an equal share of rights in matters pertaining to good rearing, proper teaching and caring. Islam assures that when applying these rights of women they would be put at a higher position. Woman has the right to provisions from her husband for all her needs and more. If she's not married then she has the right to provisions from her brother/s. If she doesn't have brothers, then the closest of kin to her will be responsible. A woman has the right to keep all of her own money. She is not responsible for maintaining the family financially. Woman has the right to get sexual satisfaction from her husband. A woman has the right to get custody of her children in case of divorce unless she is unable to raise them for a valid reason. Woman has the right to re-marry after divorce or after becoming a widow.

Islam and Non-Muslims

Islam protects the blood, wealth and honor of non-Muslims who have a pact with an Islamic nation. They should not be oppressed nor transgressed against; they should not be deprived of their rights, nor ill-treated in dealings. Allah says: "*Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.*" (Qur'an, 60:8) Prophet Muhammad said: "Indeed whoever oppresses one with whom we have a pact, deprives him of his rights, burdens him with more than he can bear, or takes something from him without his consent, then I will dispute with him on the Day of Requit." He then pointed with his finger to his chest. "Indeed whoever kills one with whom we have a pact, who is under the responsibility of Allah and His Messenger, Allah will forbid him from smelling the fragrance of the Heavens, and indeed the fragrance of Heavens may be perceived from a distance of seventy years."

Islam and other Divine Religions

Islam deems it compulsory upon its followers to believe in the previous divine Messages and in all the Prophets and Messengers. Muslims must love them all, and respect them. Allah says: "*And that was Our conclusive argument which We gave Abraham against his people. We raise by degrees whom We will. Indeed, your Lord is Wise and Knowing. And We gave to Abraham Isaac and Jacob - all of them We guided. And Noah, We guided before; and among his*

descendants, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the doers of good. And Zechariah and John and Jesus and Elias - and all were of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot - and all of them We preferred over the worlds. And some among their fathers and their descendants and their brothers - and We chose them and We guided them to a Straight Path." (Qur'an, 6:83-87)

Islam and War

One of the most misunderstood terms in Islam is Jihad. Unfortunately the word 'jihad' has been misused and as a result many people associate it with war and terrorism. Linguistically Jihad means striving, whether for good or for evil. Its general meaning signifies resisting and opposing the self, oppression, persecution or standing up to a dictator. Jihad can also denote military effort. This is seen as a last attempt to end the violation of rights of others or any act of aggression. Even during times of war Muslims are commanded to uphold morality. Acts of torture are strictly forbidden. Hurting civilians, women, children and the elderly during times of war are also strictly forbidden.

Islam also prohibits the destroying or desecrating of places of worship, killing or hurting of animals and destroying trees. At the time of fighting Abu Bakr, the first Caliph after Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), would advise his commanders saying: "I command you ten things. Learn them by heart: Don't betray, defraud, or break treaties. Don't mutilate, kill women, young children, or the elderly. Do not uproot or burn palm trees. Do not cut down fruitful trees, slaughter sheep, cows or camels except for eating. You will come across people secluded in monasteries, so leave them and what they are devoted to." Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told his companions that the greatest jihad (struggle) is the jihad against the ego.

Islam is the Faith of Peace

Islam is the Faith of Peace. Islam means to submit to Allah, adhere to obeying Him, and be free from worshipping any others besides Allah. There is no good except that which Islam ordered for it to be done, and there is no evil except that which it prohibited. Applying Islam guarantees everyone to be able to live in security and peace in light of its system, which safeguards rights for all. Allah said: "*Say, "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited to you. He commands that you not associate anything with Him, and to parents, good treatment, and do not kill your children out of poverty; We will provide for you and them; and do not approach immoralities- what is apparent of them and what is concealed; and do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden to be killed except by legal right. This has He instructed you that you may use reason;" and do not approach the orphan's property except in a way that is best until he reaches maturity; and give full measure and weight in justice. We do not charge any soul except with that within its capacity; and when you speak be just, even if it concerns a near relative; and the Covenant of Allah fulfill. This has He instructed you that you may remember.*" (Qur'an, 6:151-152)

Allah also said: "*Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.*" (Qur'an, 16:90)

Hence, the Faith of Islam is a comprehensive Faith of peace in all meanings of this word. This applies to the internal level of Muslim society as Allah said: "*And those who harm believing men and believing women for something other than what they have earned have certainly born upon themselves a slander and manifest sin.*" (Qur'an, 33:58) Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A Muslim is a person whose tongue and hand is safeguarded against, and an

emigrant is a person who has left that which Allah prohibited!" He also said: "A believer is a person whom people trust!" Islam also provides peace on an international level and it is established on forming friendly relationships that are founded on security, stability and establishing the foundations of Islam. Moreover, it is when a Muslim society does not transgress against another society, especially those that do not play with the Faith nor set up enmity against its adherents. This is according to the Words, *"O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely and perfectly and do not follow the footsteps of Shaytaan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy."* (Qur'an, 2:208)

The Faith of Islam enjoins Justice and non-oppression, even with those who set up enmity against them. Allah said: *"O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in Justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to Righteousness; and fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do."* (Qur'an, 5:8) As-Salaam, The Peaceful, is one of the All Praised's Names. Allah said: *"He is Allah, other than whom there is no deity, the Sovereign, the Pure, the Perfection, the Bestower of Faith, the Overseer, the Exalted in Might, the Compeller, the Superior. Exalted is Allah above whatever they associate with Him."* (Qur'an, 59:23) As-Salaam is one of the names of Allah's Heavens. Allah, the All High said: "For them will be the Home of Peace with their Lord, and He will be their protecting Friend because of what they used to do." (Qur'an, 6: 127) As-Salaam is the greeting of the dwellers of the Heavens. Allah said: "Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, 'Peace,' and He has prepared for them a noble Reward." (Qur'an, 33:44) As-Salaam is also the greeting of Muslims among themselves, As-Salaamu 'Alaykum (peace be with you)! It is a greeting which adds tranquility, calmness and ease for the greeting and the greeted person. This is because of the expression of security and safety within this greeting. This, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) established as one of the perfecting actions of a person's belief. He said: "You will not enter Heavens until you believe, and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I not guide you towards a thing, that if you do, you would love each other? Spread the Salaam! Greeting among you!" This is because the greeting brings hearts closer and softens them when it is given or heard. It also removes differences and hatred. When Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was asked: 'Which part of Islam is best?' he replied: "To feed people and give the Salaam! Greeting to those you know and those you do not know!"

Hence, the Faith of Islam brought regulations and Legislations at times of dealings, war, marriage, economy, politics, worship etc. It was for an ideal, virtuous society to implement and regulate a Muslim's relationship with his/her Lord, society and surrounding world, whether the human world or environment. The whole of humanity is unable to produce the like of Islam. A Faith of this Perfection and comprehensiveness is deserving of being embraced, invited towards, care to be taken to spread it, and not to set up enmity against it.

Islam and Society

Islam commands that one's environment must be cared for and protected and forbids polluting it in any way. It does so through the following means:

It encourages planting beneficial plants and trees. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "No Muslim plants a tree or crop, and its fruit is eaten by birds, people, or animals, except that it will be regarded as charity for him."

It encourages the removal of anything that may inflict harm. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Removing harm from the path is charity."

It encourages quarantining those afflicted with diseases and epidemics in order to prevent its spread to other societies and protecting the lives of others. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "If you hear of a plague in a certain location, then do not enter it, and if it strikes a place where you are, then do not leave it."

It forbids random killing of animals and birds. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever kills a sparrow for no reason, it will cry to Allah on the Day of Requital, 'O Allah, so and so killed me without reason or benefit!'"

It forbids polluting the society in any way. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Fear two things for which people curse others for." [His Companions] asked: "What are the two things for which people will curse others for, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied: "That he relieves himself in places where people walk or where they seek shade."

Islam and Cleanliness

Islam is a religion of Cleanliness.

Allah says: "*O children of Adam, take your adornment at every mosque, and eat and drink, but do not waste: verily He does not love the wasteful.*" (Qur'an, 7:31)

It is a religion of purity. Allah says: "*Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.*" (Qur'an, 2:222)

Purity is a condition for the Prayer to be regarded valid, and the Prayer is an act of worship which a Muslim performs at least five times throughout his daily routine. Islam also requires that one bathe after ejaculation or sexual intercourse, and highly encourages taking a bath before performing those types of worship which are manifest symbols of Islam, such as the Friday Prayer and the Greater and Lesser Pilgrimage to Makkah. Allah says in the Glorious Quran: "*O you who believe! When you rise up for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads (with wet hands), and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. And if you are in a state of major ritual impurity (janaba), purify yourselves (by taking a bath). And if you are sick or on a journey, or one of you comes from the answering of call of nature, or you have had contact with women, and you find no water, then go to clean earth and wipe your faces and hands with some of it. Allah does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you and to perfect His grace upon you that you may give thanks.*" (Qur'an, 5:6)

Islam also encourages that one wash his hands prior and subsequent to meals. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Food is blessed when one washes his hands before and after it."

It encourages that one keep his mouth and teeth clean. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Had I not found it difficult for my followers, I would have ordered them to cleanse their teeth before every prayer."

It encourages that one cleanse and purify those places that may become a breeding ground for germs and filth. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "There are five acts which are from the innate nature with which Allah created humans: circumcision, removing the pubic hair, plucking the hair of the armpits, shortening the moustache, and clipping the nails."

Islam and Knowledge

The religion of Islam encourages all people to seek and increase their knowledge, and it disparages and warns against ignorance. Allah says: "*Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe and those who have been granted knowledge.*" (Qur'an, 58:11)

It regards striving to seek, learn, and teach knowledge as a means which leads to paradise. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever seeks a path in search of knowledge, Allah would make easy for him a path leading to paradise."

He forbade that knowledge be concealed, as it is an obligation for each person to seek it. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever conceals knowledge would be muzzled on the Day of Resurrection with a muzzle of Fire."

Islam regards scholars with high esteem and demands that they be paid their due respect. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He is not from my followers, he who does not respect his elders, who does not show mercy to the young, and does not give due right to a scholar."

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) informed us of the status of the scholar in his sayings: "The excellence of a scholar over a layman is like my excellence over the least of you."



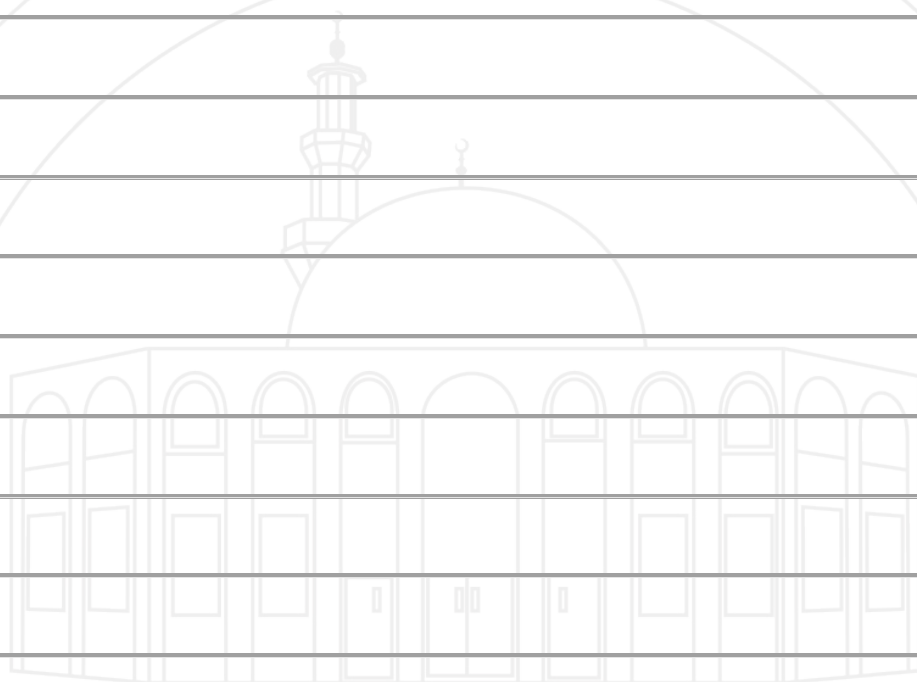
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